


ARTICLE

## “The World’s Greatest Hypocrites”: White Men and Diplomatic Reporting in the Early Cold War

Kathryn J. McGarr 

*When incorporating the press into historical narratives, scholars have often relied on published newspaper and magazine articles without interrogating how those pieces were produced. This article relies on the under-used archival papers of journalists in the early Cold War period to argue that they actively created a Washington consensus on foreign policy that kept economic determinism out of the U.S. public’s understanding of policies like the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. In private, however, the more anticommunist public narrative was contradicted by a discourse that emphasized the importance of access to colonial raw materials. This private discourse was enabled by the Washington press corps’ social spaces, which were segregated by race and gender and helped create a worldview that acknowledged the hypocrisy of the U.S. government but not their own.*

“I am pretty sick of the whole theory of American self-righteousness,” Joseph C. Harsch, a Washington reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* and commentator for the Columbia Broadcasting Service (CBS), wrote to a friend in 1944 as the Allies were planning the peace:

We are the pretty innocents of the world who never grab anything while naughty Britain and wicked Russia look after their own self-interests and security. Nonsense! We aren’t going to get anything out of this war. No? We are just going to take all the islands in the Pacific which happen to be all we need to guarantee our naval and air control of that Ocean.<sup>1</sup>

The midwestern Harsch was not a radical leftist but a liberal internationalist—socially and ideologically in the mainstream of his cohort of diplomatic reporters at mid-century who believed the United States must remain a leader in the global community after World War II. His newspaper was among the most highly regarded in the nation, and his radio spot gave him a broader popular audience. He continued, “My only contention is that we have the appearance of greater morality only where we can afford to be more moral—which isn’t as often as we like to believe. Sometimes I think that we are the world’s greatest hypocrites.”<sup>2</sup>

Thank you to Julian Zelizer for years of generous feedback and support, and Margot Canaday, Kevin Kruse, and Michael Schudson, for their extensive comments on work on which this article is based. Wangui Muigai, the editors at *Modern American History*, and four anonymous reviewers provided essential feedback on recent drafts. I am grateful for funding from Princeton University and the help of the archivists at the Library of Congress, Wisconsin Historical Society, New York Public Library, and National Archives for making the research for this article possible.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Harsch to Mike [unidentified], Oct. 31, 1944, folder “Correspondence, 1944, Oct.-Dec., n.d.,” box 2, Joseph C. Harsch Papers (U.S. Mss 2AF), Division of Library, Archives, and Museum Collections, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI [hereafter JCH].

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is unaltered and is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use or in order to create a derivative work.

The transition from waging war to waging peace, as it was called then, has been described as a time when both mainstream liberals and conservatives believed that political ideology trumped economic concerns: that the United States cared more about combating communism than acquiring markets and raw materials.<sup>3</sup> The United States was a force for good and supported self-determination for all nations, this dominant thinking is supposed to have held, and people struggling for independence ought to understand the United States was not an empire like the Soviet Union or Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> Ideas about the role of Western imperialism that U.S. government propagandists in the 1940s and 1950s worked so hard to disavow did not become widely accepted in the U.S. until the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, and then mostly in academia.<sup>5</sup> Yet those ideas were privately discussed and widely accepted in the 1940s and 1950s in diplomatic reporting circles, among the very people responsible for shaping Americans' perception of foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Press coverage of foreign affairs had gained new importance since World War II, with the *Washington Post* assigning a full-time reporter to cover the State Department for the first time in 1946. The size of this cohort of diplomatic reporters fluctuated, but the trend since the war was growth; whereas only about three newspapers had covered the State Department full-time before the war, twelve to fifteen were regularly on the beat after, with another dozen political writers, bureau chiefs, and columnists completing the group discussed in this article.<sup>7</sup>

A story of unthinking Cold War patriotism has been the dominant narrative about mid-century journalists, and content analysis—rather than archives—has been the dominant methodology in media studies. While content analyses are crucial to understanding what the public was reading, they often cannot describe why or how the stories were written.<sup>8</sup> In his 1970 book

<sup>3</sup>For a twentieth-century historiography of U.S. Cold War foreign policy including this early “traditionalist” view, see Steven Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy: Key Perspectives* (Edinburgh, UK, 2005). More recent work into the twenty-first century has focused less on U.S. diplomacy and more on the global Cold War as it played out on the ground in countries both affected by and shaping that diplomacy. For instance, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York, 2007); Robert J. McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (New York, 2013); Gregg Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry During the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017); and David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA, 2018).

<sup>4</sup>The U.S. government's archival records indicate that the propaganda and information officials charged with countering Soviet claims of U.S. imperialism did not believe (or, at least, did not convey in print) that these claims had merit. See Laura A. Belmonte, “Promoting American Anti-Imperialism in the Early Cold War,” in *Empire's Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism*, ed. Ian Tyrell and Jay Sexton (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 187–201.

<sup>5</sup>As early as 1959, revisionist diplomatic historians developed the idea that “open door imperialism” had driven U.S. foreign policy for 100 years, and still did so in the Cold War. See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, OH, 1959); other historians in this Wisconsin School of diplomatic history include Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY, 1963), and Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago, 1967). On economic determinism in the Cold War period, see especially Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York, 1972).

<sup>6</sup>On the news media as “important objects of inquiry” for scholars of foreign policy narratives and public opinion, see Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 2004), 11. Entman's project is to create a model—the *cascading activation* model—for describing post-Cold War foreign policy reporting.

<sup>7</sup>Wallace Deuel to Duncan and Sadie Deuel, Oct. 6, 1945, chron. files, box 1, Wallace R. Deuel Papers (MSS75905), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC [hereafter WRD].

<sup>8</sup>Historical works that use content analysis as the primary methodology include, among many others, Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York, 1979); Daniel Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* (New York, 1986); William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley, 1987); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988); W. Lance Bennett, “Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States,” *Journal of*

*The Press and the Cold War*, James Aronson, a journalist of mainstream and later leftist publications, argues that the press is an arm of government power, rather than a watchdog, a theme that sociologists, political scientists, and linguists—all practicing in the relatively new field of communication studies—have taken up in ensuing years. The sociologist Herbert Gans, in his 1979 *Deciding What's News*, finds what he calls journalists' "enduring values" of "ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership," all of which necessarily shaped reporters' outlook.<sup>9</sup> In their 1988 work *Manufacturing Consent*, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky name this system of values the "propaganda model," positing that several filters—including concentration of ownership, effects of advertising, and dependence on government "flaks" for information—determine what news gets reported and how.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the idea of government propaganda has been at the center of political communication studies on the media, and most scholars agree that foreign policy reporters practiced "the journalism of deference" in this period, as William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang describe the reporting on Iran from 1951 to 1978.<sup>11</sup> Because so much news coverage in the 1940s and 1950s—especially in *Time* magazine—did reflect a narrow, black-and-white Cold War mindset, it has been easy to blame or dismiss a generation of reporters as gullible, deferential, or patriotic.<sup>12</sup> Important works have painted reporters in this period in the broad strokes of having a more passive "Cold War mindset," adhering to a "Cold War consensus," or "embrac[ing] dichotomous black-and-white thinking."<sup>13</sup> Reliance on government sources, news stories, and journalists' memories obscures that story about the men who consciously determined the dominant foreign policy narratives.<sup>14</sup> Among the few to push back against this dominant narrative is historian Steven Casey, who has explored the complex relationships between the government and news outlets during the

---

*Communication* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 103–25; Nicholas O. Berry, *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of the New York Times' Coverage of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1990); John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1991," *Political Communication* 13, no. 4 (Oct. 1996): 385–405; John Foran, "Discursive Subversions: *Time* Magazine, the CIA Overthrow of Mussadiq and the Installation of the Shah," in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945–1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst, MA, 2000), 157–82; and Kathleen Fink and Michael Schudson, "The Rise of Contextual Journalism, 1950s–2000s," *Journalism* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 2014): 3–20.

<sup>9</sup>Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 42.

<sup>10</sup>Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2. For more on the propaganda model as now part of the mainstream foreign policy/communications cannon, see Eric Herring and Piers Robinson, "Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 4 (Oct. 2003): 553–68.

<sup>11</sup>Dorman and Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran*.

<sup>12</sup>On *Time* magazine, see Foran, "Discursive Subversions," 173–4. Henry Luce—the founder of *Time* magazine, as well as *Life*, *Fortune*, and other *Time*, Inc. properties—is perhaps the best remembered of the internationalist publishers, having authored an often-cited 1941 *Life* magazine article, "The American Century," which argued for America intervention and pre-eminence around the globe. The fact that Luce produced several mass circulation magazines certainly meant his reach with the American public was wide. But in Washington policy circles, *Time* magazine was not respected for its journalism and had a poor reputation among reporters and officials. William L. Rivers, in his 1965 study of Washington journalism, *The Opinionmakers* (Boston, 1965), classifies *Time* magazine and Drew Pearson as "the outcasts" of the press in Washington—both hated and mistrusted, yet also read by everyone. By contrast, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*—along with the *New York Herald-Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and one or two others—were the periodicals that influenced the foreign policy discourse in the capital and whose reports from Washington, along with those from the Associated Press, could set the tone for many smaller newspapers across the country.

<sup>13</sup>Entman, *Projections of Power*, 2, 5; Barbie Zelizer, "Why Journalism in the Age of Trump Shouldn't Surprise Us," in *Trump and the Media*, ed. Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 9–16, here 14.

<sup>14</sup>For examples of important works on propaganda that privilege archival material from government archives, see Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945–1955* (Westport, CT, 2002); and Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS, 2006).

Korean War and demonstrated that “both institutions were far from monoliths,” using a broad archival base to explain how complicated public opinion was during the Korean War.<sup>15</sup> A recent turn toward history of the media among political historians has brought an archivally based focus to an influential group that believed itself to be writing the first draft of history.<sup>16</sup> Under-used archival sources from the crucial period in which the United States created its Cold War policies show a complex story about anticommunism and suggest that few reporters, in Washington at least, held illusions about the lofty goals of American foreign policy, nor were they duped by officials. Archival papers do not show a natural, patriotic consensus but instead demonstrate how newspapermen’s social lives, which in Washington were indistinguishable from their professional identities, created a climate that delineated the range of opinions acceptable for public consumption and tolerated greater criticism and frankness only behind closed doors. Because so much information was shared in private spaces, the reporters who wanted to remain on the diplomatic beat of their newspapers—and on the invitation lists required to do that job—needed to maintain a trustworthy reputation.

There was no national consensus on liberal internationalism after World War II. In addition to competing with strains of isolationism that had never disappeared, internationalists had disagreements and divisions among themselves—about degrees of interventionism, military preparedness, and the extent of U.S. participation in supranational organizations like the United Nations, to name just three cleavages.<sup>17</sup> Among this diplomatic-reporting cohort of friends and club members who ate together, worked together, and put on skits together, there were broad consensuses forged in the physical spaces of Washington, though: internationalist and Atlantic-oriented. The consensus about foreign policy was not that communism was evil and must be stopped. Most diplomatic reporters took the threat of communism seriously, but not so seriously they could not joke about it and make it a laughing matter. Instead, these diplomatic reporters’ chief concern, shared with many policy makers, was that Western Europe, saved twice already in a thirty-year period, must be preserved and allowed to thrive. To thrive, it must have ongoing access to the world’s raw materials, from its own former colonies and other developing nations, which would require American leadership to maintain traditional colonial power dynamics. The private discourse among the white men of the press perpetuated affinity for white, Western nations, which in turn shaped their printed narratives. Meanwhile, the voices of dissent and critique coming from the Black press, socialist press, and occasional political leftists—all of which anticipated the revisionism of Cold War historians—were not allowed to penetrate the segregated sphere that white, male reporters created for themselves in the

<sup>15</sup>Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950–1953* (New York, 2008), 13.

<sup>16</sup>See Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Media Nation: The Political History of News in Modern America* (Philadelphia, 2017). With the exception of Donald A. Ritchie (*Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps*, New York, 2005), historians of twentieth-century politics have, until recently, largely overlooked journalists, a group that too often writes its own history through memoirs. Recent work in twentieth-century political media history includes Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia, 2016); Sam Lebovic, *Free Speech and Unfree News: The Paradox of Press Freedom in America* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); and Matthew Pressman, *On Press: The Liberal Values that Shaped the News* (Cambridge, MA, 2018). Prior to this renewed interest in journalism, political historians have more often focused on individual journalists who played active and, more importantly, visible roles in foreign-policy making, like so-called “Cold Warrior” Joseph Alsop, the syndicated columnist and public intellectual Walter Lippmann, and the Time-Life publisher Henry Luce. For instance, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston, 1980); James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston, 1987); Edwin Yoder, *Joe Alsop’s Cold War: A Study of Journalistic Influence and Intrigue* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995); Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York, 2010); and Gregg Herken, *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington* (New York, 2014).

<sup>17</sup>On a dominant shift in this period from 1940s Wilsonian liberal internationalism to 1970s conservative internationalism, see Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York, 2010).

physical spaces of Washington: at the Mayflower Hotel for background luncheons with public officials, in the Statler Hotel ballroom for Gridiron Club banquets, or at private “seminars” with public officials.<sup>18</sup>

Hypocrisy was a common theme of reporters’ private journals, letters, and conversations. Wallace Deuel, one of Harsch’s many friends in Washington’s diplomatic press corps, wrote in a similar vein as Harsch on hypocrisy. Deuel was also from the Midwest and during World War II had taken a leave of absence from the *Chicago Daily News* to work for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency, then briefly for the State Department setting up operations in occupied Germany.<sup>19</sup> Several times in his post-World War II notes and letters, Deuel compared Americans’ attitudes on sex with their attitudes on foreign policy—that is, that they “do the same things everybody else does, but they honestly don’t realize/think they do.” He wrote in private notes in February 1946, “Americans have no idea what their conduct looks like to other people, and are sincerely outraged when the others call things by their right names.” Deuel and Harsch had both been based in Europe for periods before the war and were especially attuned to international attitudes, as were most of their fellow diplomatic reporters. They spent as much time developing sources on Washington’s Embassy Row as at the State Department, to the chagrin of the State Department. “The others, for their part, see little but the rankest kind of hypocrisy in the American attitude,” Deuel continued, referring to foreigners. “You can do anything you like, provided you don’t call it by its right name or give your real reasons for doing it. This is particularly the case with regard to power.”<sup>20</sup> While the white men of the mainstream press did not critique foreign policy in terms of race, as members of the Black mainstream press did, they nevertheless had a *realpolitik* assessment of U.S. motives that were considerably less altruistic than readers believed, or as triumphalist as traditionalist foreign policy historians ventured at that time.<sup>21</sup>

The Washington press corps’ social spaces allowed journalists to create a worldview that acknowledged the hypocrisy of the U.S. government in private but seldom in print, while ignoring their own. As diplomatic reporters gathered to discuss America’s position as a new kind of imperial power, as they had been doing since the war, the public/private divide of their social and professional spaces helped create one conversation within Washington and another for public consumption. The published record, which did not always reflect the knowledge and thinking of journalists, has colored the way historians have thought about journalists achieving a Cold War–based consensus.<sup>22</sup> Consensus was not natural but was built by networks of reporters in the physical spaces they controlled in the capital. Reporters recognized a hypocrisy in America’s postwar power grab that they kept to themselves for professional reasons, so as not to alienate readers and newspaper executives, and for personal reasons, to prove their trust and loyalty in a closed group. Uncovering the private conversations permits a better understanding of why there appeared to be a sphere of consensus among reporters in the

<sup>18</sup>Sociologists and historians have noted the social construction of information and the “occupational socialization” of professions, including news reporting. For instance, see Warren Breed, “Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis,” *Social Forces* 33, no. 4 (May 1955): 326–35; Robert Darnton, “Writing News and Telling Stories,” *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 175–94; Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York, 1978); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1995); and Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

<sup>19</sup>Wallace Deuel to Frank Knox, Aug. 6, 1941, chron. files, box 6, WRD; Wallace Deuel to Duncan and Sadie Deuel, Sep. 26, 1944, chron. files, box 1, WRD.

<sup>20</sup>Notes, Feb. 23, 1946, chron. files, box 8, WRD.

<sup>21</sup>Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy*, 10.

<sup>22</sup>A patriotic “sphere of consensus” among reporters since World War II has been the standard narrative since Hallin, *The “Uncensored War,”* 116–7. Hallin argues that the media were not as critical of Vietnam policy as is commonly remembered, but that they mostly followed the government’s line. When they were critical in the later years, it was after elite consensus on Vietnam had already broken down.

first draft of Cold War history and why, in private, the sphere was much less circumscribed than was publicly evident at the time.

### Background Sessions of Trustworthy Men

Clubs, physical spaces, luncheons, and stag (men-only) banquets made Washington an insular town where it was easy to have one conversation within the city's limits and another facing the public. Literal boys' clubs—facilitating relationships between members, bonding them together through annual rituals, and creating outsiders—played an important role in establishing newspaper norms and consensuses, in determining what should be reported or withheld, and what constituted legitimate news. Like in the business world, described by the historian Pamela Walker Laird in *Pull*, elite reporters used private clubs to maintain control over their profession and—in closing themselves to reporters with different backgrounds and experiences—reinforced the echo chamber.<sup>23</sup> The constant fellowship and togetherness of white, male reporters could then inhibit dissent outside that circle.

While private conversations and elite club memberships had dominated the capital since its founding, the background reporting sessions between reporters and officials that were such a staple of early-Cold War reporting had their origins in World War II.<sup>24</sup> The war provided an important precedent for the reporters who would then go on to report on the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and the practice of background and off-the-record sessions confounds the idea of a press that believed itself to be at the height of objectivity in this period.<sup>25</sup> The practice of objectivity in journalism—the professional norm since the 1930s—was meant to protect reporters from charges of bias by prescribing that they gather attributable evidence. Early twentieth-century press critics had accused journalists and media organizations of being propagandists: in the Progressive Era, for capitalism and big business, and in World War I and the Russian Revolution, for the government.<sup>26</sup> As a result, journalists in the 1920s moved toward professionalism and objectivity to restore the public's faith in the media. Objectivity included skepticism toward sources, using a variety of sources to create a fair portrait of the news, and attributing news so that readers could form their own judgments about its reliability. The World War II background sessions, from which reporters could not attribute material, meant they and their news organizations were expected to take responsibility for printing information from government sources they often mistrusted. From its inception, the practice threatened the ideal they had of objectivity. Yet because of World War II, these private meetings between reporters and officials became a standard way for officials to convey information and for reporters to come to understandings with each other and their sources.<sup>27</sup> On a practical level, the men running the war were too busy to provide confidential information

<sup>23</sup>Pamela Walker Laird, *Pull: Networking and Success Since Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

<sup>24</sup>On early networks, men's boarding houses, and eating clubs, see James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community: 1800–1828* (New York, 1966).

<sup>25</sup>The press as striving for objectivity in this period is the standard narrative for journalism history. See Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, 1978). The current perception among historians, exemplified in Lebovic, *Free Speech and Unfree News*, is that journalists *believed* themselves to be objective in this period.

<sup>26</sup>Two especially scathing critiques of journalism from prominent writers in this period are Upton Sinclair, *The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism* (Pasadena, CA, 1919), and Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, "A Test of the News," A Supplement to *The New Republic*, Aug. 4, 1920, 1–42. Even as journalism completed a period of professionalization in the interwar periods, with the proliferation of journalism schools, codes of ethics, and associations, the critiques remained. For a concise summary of the history of professionalization and criticism, see Robert W. McChesney, "The Problem of Journalism," in *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York, 2008), 25–66, here 26–38.

<sup>27</sup>For an excellent overview of the media during wartime, see Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2000).

on an individual basis; background conferences were more efficient. And unlike a press conference, which anyone accredited to the department could attend, private meetings included only the men that the other reporters trusted.

“Newsmen,” as they called themselves, did not have a sense of community obligation or fellowship toward women reporters, who were deemed less trustworthy and who were usually excluded from the discourse. In November 1941, a U.S. senator from Maine was so impressed with the ability of a female Washington correspondent to keep a conversation confidential—since, as he put it, “We sometimes think that women have trouble in keeping secrets”—that he wrote her publisher to compliment her.<sup>28</sup> Men were presumed trustworthy until proven otherwise, as some men inevitably were; meanwhile, a woman keeping a confidence was so unexpected that it occasioned a letter of praise. Issues of trustworthiness that had seemed merely important before the war could be justified as life-and-death matters of national security, especially after the introduction of nuclear weapons in 1945. In a letter to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes late in 1945, his friend, the columnist Joseph Alsop, characterized the issue of trust as the difference between “those newspapermen who are, so to speak, only of press conference caliber, and those whose background, training and reliability fits them for fuller disclosure of the facts.”<sup>29</sup> His barely coded language was clear: women, African Americans, foreigners, and unconnectable (out of Washington’s mainstream) white men were “only of press conference caliber.” The true gentlemen of the press, however, could be entrusted with sensitive information. Even newspaper publishers or editors who had women on their staffs did not risk assigning them to the growing foreign policy beat because they would have missed the important private sessions and conversations from which they were excluded. That quirk of diplomatic reporting meant greater homogeneity among the reporters covering that beat than any other area in Washington and, in turn, created more homogenous—often masculine—news frames.<sup>30</sup>

Early examples of the new system of exclusive information sharing indicate the precedents set, including the players involved. An important official source during and after World War II was George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff who would become Secretary of State in 1947 and namesake of the European Recovery Program (ERP), or Marshall Plan. On a Friday morning late in October 1942, Marshall held what one columnist called in his diary a “small conference hand-picked.”<sup>31</sup> Marshall’s office was filled with what he and his Washington advisors considered to be trustworthy men, and his agenda was obvious to that hand-selected audience. “Evident purpose ... to clear up confusion over divided command in South Pacific,” the columnist Raymond Clapper wrote in his notes.<sup>32</sup> In the South Pacific, the Allies’ offensive Guadalcanal campaign had been ongoing since August and would last until February of the following year. While the campaign was ultimately an Allied victory, news out of the South Pacific that year was often bleak, and the competing strategies that Ernest J. King of the

<sup>28</sup>Sen. Ralph Brewster to Guy Gannett, Nov. 13, 1941, box OV1, May Craig Papers (MSS17103), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>29</sup>Joseph Alsop to James Byrnes, Dec. 27, 1945, chron. files, box 2, Joseph Alsop and Stewart Alsop Papers (MSS10561), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter JASA].

<sup>30</sup>In the reporting on Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran, for instance, Mary Ann Heiss finds Orientalism, Western gender stereotypes, and a portrayal of Middle Eastern nationalist leaders as “feminine” to have been central to U.S. policy in Iran. Just as there were few women in government who might have challenged that stereotype, there were few in journalism circles to have offered an alternative. Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950–1954* (New York, 1997). On the significance of gender stereotyping to foreign policy, see also Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT, 1998); and Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, MA, 2001).

<sup>31</sup>Raymond Clapper diary, Oct. 30, 1942, chron. files, box 23, Raymond Clapper Papers (MSS15925), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter RCP].

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

Navy and Douglas MacArthur of the Army advocated sowed anxiety at home about divided factions. Even when there was good news, as at the Battle of Midway in June 1942, which the Allies won, there was rivalry. Clapper had heard of the rivalry from the Under Secretary of the Navy himself, James Forrestal, who had told Clapper off-the-record while having a private lunch with him in June, “Navy men a little bitter at Army publicity over Midway....”<sup>33</sup> Marshall, by holding “seminars,” as the men first called these innovative sessions, was trying to fix some of these public relations issues. He was successful. The morning after Marshall’s conference, the *New York Herald Tribune* ran a front-page story about the Army’s appreciation of the Navy. The article cited a thank-you letter Marshall had written to King for safely conveying troops through enemy waters and quoted from the letter that, “In this war, as in no other in our history, the Army and Navy are fighting together....”<sup>34</sup> The feel-good story elided the bitterness between the branches that was common knowledge within Washington and brought reporters into active complicity with the government.

In addition to only including men, these seminars included only white reporters, since reporters for the Black press were outsiders to their newspaper brethren. In fact, newspapermen of the Standing Committee of Correspondents, which determined access to the congressional press galleries at the Capitol building, banned Black reporters from entry until 1947, and only relented then because Congress intervened.<sup>35</sup> One conversation at a secret Pentagon meeting with Marshall and reporters on August 25, 1943, demonstrates why the men would have believed they needed this unacknowledged precedent that no Black reporters should be included in background sessions. According to a *Washington Post* reporter’s private memo to his publisher, Marshall “was particularly forceful on the subject of negroes in the Army. He said that they were no good as combat troops, as the last war proved, and that it was getting to be a terrific problem as to what to do with this class of troops.”<sup>36</sup> Not only the troops, but also the Black press itself came under scrutiny as an “other” in the same conversation. Marshall had continued, according to the memo, “With this situation existing, the negro press was screaming about discrimination, while responsible army men know that these troops cannot be trusted in combat.”<sup>37</sup> The Black press, this line of thinking promoted, were irresponsible “screamers,” the last sort of men who could be included in a hush-hush meeting. Black newspapers had a history of public advocacy, long recognizing that the objectivity for which the white press strived was itself racialized, and this ironically, yet unsurprisingly, made them appear biased to white officials like Marshall and his boss, Franklin Roosevelt, who tried to wage a private campaign against Black newspapers during the war.<sup>38</sup> Roosevelt and other officials were especially annoyed at the “double-V” campaign—victory over fascism abroad and over racism at home—begun in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, which had widespread purchase among African Americans during World War II.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the Army at this time was promising to rectify discrimination and trying to promote a narrative of racial harmony, and

<sup>33</sup>Clapper diary, June 30, 1942, chron. files, box 23, RCP.

<sup>34</sup>“800,000 Troops of U.S. Army at Posts Abroad,” *New York Herald Tribune*, Nov. 1, 1942, 1.

<sup>35</sup>On congressional gallery rules, see Donald A. Ritchie, *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 109–10; and Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York, 2005), 35–7.

<sup>36</sup>Alexander F. “Casey” Jones to Eugene Meyer, Aug. 26, 1943, folder “Marshall, George C. 1941–45,” box 35, Eugene Meyer Papers (MSS52019), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>On government persecution of the Black press during World War II, see Patrick S. Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government’s Investigation of the Black Press During World War II* (New York, 1986). On the history of advocacy in Black newspapers, see Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL, 2006); and Fred Carroll, *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL, 2017).

<sup>39</sup>See Lee Finkle, “The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest During World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 3 (Dec. 1973): 692–713; Lawrence P. Scott and William M. Womack, Sr., *Double V: The*



those were the statements that the white press published. The racist comments officials made in background sessions within the walls of the new Pentagon complex remained there.

Reporters wrote up their notes with “top secret” or “confidential” typed at the top of each page. By the end of the war, the officials who participated in this new, confidential information economy understood that top secret meant only “to be withheld from the public,” not from other influential and trusted newsmen, who were essential to building policy consensus. For instance, when the future Secretary of State James F. Byrnes returned from the Yalta conference in February 1945 and briefed Turner Catledge, a *New York Times* reporter and later its managing editor, Catledge wrote his editors: “What he told me was, of course, in the strictest of confidence so far as he is concerned, but he knew I would pass the essential parts of the information along to my associates on The New York Times.”<sup>40</sup>

Within a few years of the advent of background sessions, the guidelines governing them became known within the capital as the “Lindley Rule,” after Ernest Lindley, *Newsweek’s* Washington bureau chief, who was a frequent background dinner participant and organizer. As with most new social systems, naming the guidelines was important to ensuring their continuation. The ground rules remained unwritten, though, until Alfred Friendly of the *Washington Post* wrote a widely circulated memo for his staff in July 1958, defining rules for quoting sources. The memo was so famous in reporting circles that it was remembered and reprinted forty years later in *Nieman Reports*, a journalism trade publication.<sup>41</sup> Under his definition of “For background only,” Friendly wrote:

This convention, also known as “Without attribution,” “The Lindley Rule,” “The Rule of Compulsory Plagiarism,” or simply as “Don’t quote me,” is a common one and is used—or should be—when a person of considerable importance or delicate position is discussing a matter in circumstances in which his name cannot be used for reasons of public policy or personal vulnerability.

Friendly then outlined the obvious problem with background sessions: “It is often abused by persons who want to sink a knife or do a job without risking their own position or facing the consequences to themselves.... In some cases, however, the ‘background only’ procedure is legitimate and provides an honest, worthwhile story which could not be obtained in any other way.”<sup>42</sup> From the beginning of background dinners, reporters were wary of sources who were settling personal scores or launching trial balloons—leaking a policy to determine its popularity before committing to it. Reporters traded in information, though, meaning that obtaining some worthwhile stories outweighed the risk of abuse and ensured their silence when officials called for it. But the very background system that ironed out dissent itself remained a contentious practice. In a 1966 oral history interview, Chalmers Roberts, the *Washington Post’s* diplomatic reporter since 1953, recalled an early meeting that his predecessor as the *Post’s* first diplomatic reporter, Ferdinand Kuhn, had skipped, “on the grounds that the Secretary of State had no business operating this way. If he wanted to say what he wanted to say, he should say it on the public record. A lot of people felt that way. This was then really a new technique, but naturally we bent to it because we couldn’t escape it,” Roberts admitted.<sup>43</sup>

*Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (East Lansing, MI, 1994); and Rawn James Jr., *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America’s Military* (New York, 2013).

<sup>40</sup>Turner Catledge to Arthur Krock, Feb. 26, 1945, book I, box 1, Arthur Krock Papers (MC079), Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ [hereafter AKP].

<sup>41</sup>William Rivers refers to this memo as being “widely read throughout the press corps” in *The Opinionmakers*, 37.

<sup>42</sup>Alfred Friendly, “Attribution of News,” *Nieman Reports* 53/54, nos. 4/1 (Winter 1999/Spring 2000): 119–21.

<sup>43</sup>Chalmers Roberts interview by Richard D. Challener, Jan. 13, 1966, transcript, p. 5, The John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

Once background dinners became part of routine reporting in Washington, there was no escape. Because their livelihood depended on it, these white, male reporters—the only ones privy to outside information—tolerated having one conversation within Washington and another that was public-facing.

### Saving Western Europeans, “A First Class People”

On May 10, 1947, the Gridiron Club dinner—the elite off-the-record session that topped them all—took place, two months after President Harry Truman requested from Congress a \$400 million aid package for Greece and Turkey. In his speech, the president had outlined what became known as the Truman Doctrine, an interventionist policy that called for defeating communism wherever it emerged.<sup>44</sup> The dinner provides a glimpse into the range of acceptable conversation that could take place in Washington’s private spaces, as well as a broader vision of how these spaces reinforced dominant views. The Gridiron Club, founded in 1885, was a group of the most elite Washington journalists, as determined by themselves, who twice a year put on a banquet with skits and song parodies poking fun at policy makers and politicians.<sup>45</sup> The Gridiron Club’s spring 1947 banquet had all the elements that typified those dinners: attendance by nearly every top government official, influential reporter, and publisher; a dress code of white tie and tails; terrapin stew, the Club’s signature dish; performances in black-face; and jokes about foreign policy that revealed the depth of understanding of the limits and even demerits of U.S. intervention that these same men did not acknowledge in public writings.

In 1941, the Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who would become famous for expanding the internationalist wing of the Republican Party and helping to establish the United Nations, had written a magazine story about the history of the Gridiron in *Liberty* magazine, praising its men and making a case for its importance. “It is doubtful whether any other

<sup>44</sup>As Richard M. Freeland has argued in *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and International Security, 1946–1948* (New York, 1985), Harry Truman and the Truman Doctrine, more than Senator Joseph McCarthy, created the atmosphere in which McCarthyism—a frantic, illogical anticommunism at its peak in the early 1950s—could flourish. On Americans’ deeply rooted anticommunist sentiments, see Melvyn Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The U.S. and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1953* (New York, 1994). McCarthyism and the press have been explored at length, mostly relating to political and domestic coverage of the senator. See Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison, WI, 1981); and Edward Alwood, *Dark Days in the Newsroom: McCarthyism Aimed at the Press* (Philadelphia, 2007). McCarthyism affected reporters, of course, but in the correspondence I have collected from Washington foreign affairs reporters, the senator appeared mostly as a distant nuisance, preventing their fellow domestic affairs reporters from covering what they thought were more important issues or representing a strain of anticommunism to which no one in their respectable Washington circles subscribed. Theirs was the liberal anticommunism that nevertheless enabled purges to take place, including at newspapers. The *New York Times* fired anyone who worked in news production (as opposed to printing) who pled the Fifth Amendment before Congress, though these men were far away in the New York office, not in the insular and protected Washington bureau. See David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York, 1978), 446–53.

<sup>45</sup>For details on the club’s founding, see Arthur Wallace Dunn, *Gridiron Nights: Humorous and Satirical Views of Politics and Statesmen as Presented by the Famous Dining Club* (New York, 1974 [1915]); and James Free, *The First 100 Years! A Casual Chronicle of the Gridiron Club* (Washington, DC, 1985). Initially, the club’s by-laws mandated two annual dinners, but the increased pace of newspaper work after World War II meant the members had less time for the skit-writing and rehearsals required to stage “public” dinners, as they called their main events. The president also had less time to attend such events, which had multiplied since the war, and Dwight Eisenhower let it be known before he came into office that two Gridiron dinners a year was too much to expect a president to attend. In January 1953, the men officially amended their by-laws so that they could host one large, white-tie dinner per year in the spring, with a second, “informal” (black tie) dinner for members and a small group of guests in the winter. The Gridiron Dinner remains an annual event in Washington and has been open to women since 1972. For protests against and integration of the Gridiron, see Marama Whyte, “The Press for Equality: Women Journalists, Grassroots Activism, and the Feminist Fight for American Media” (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Sydney, 2020) [and book-in-progress].

group of fifty private citizens have wielded a greater indirect influence upon the public questions which the glow of the Gridiron has illuminated—although any conscious thought of ‘exerting influence’ is farthest from the Gridiron thought or purpose,” Vandenberg wrote, continuing:

But one of these Gridiron “skits,” as they are called, may succeed so conclusively in projecting the innate absurdity of something in the national prospectus that even its sponsors may conclude not to risk a national reaction in kind. I think I have seen exactly that thing happen more than once in the twenty-six consecutive dinners which I have been lucky enough to be invited to attend.<sup>46</sup>

While we do not know if the spring 1947 dinner provoked policy changes, we do know it was an opportunity for 500 of the nation’s elites to come together in Washington, in the midst of a foreign policy sea change, and work through the new consensus.

During the May 1947 dinner, the foreign affairs skit—a staple of the Gridiron show—jabbed at the Truman Doctrine, with Truman and Marshall at the head table. One of the chief criticisms of that policy was that the more communistic a country was leaning, the more money it would receive, so that it behooved a country to pretend to be more susceptible to communism than it was. Communism *was* a laughing matter. The skit took place in the fictitious kingdom of the cannibals, the only place where Truman Doctrine aid supposedly had yet to reach. The stage had a man-sized kettle over an electric fire, a gaudy throne for the cannibal king, and a palm tree with a prop payphone in it. The chorus of cannibals for this skit were all wearing blackface, which was a common Gridiron costume. Amateur minstrelsy was a tradition in white men’s fraternal organizations and, as the historian Rhae Lynn Barnes argues, was also “integral to domestic and international imperialism.”<sup>47</sup> Skits like these seamlessly connected domestic racism to the racism of pro-colonial foreign policy. The scene opened with the cannibal king, played by Lewis Wood of the *New York Times*, saying to the cannibal treasury secretary, played by Peter Brandt of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: “Mister Sekatary of de Treasury, you look lower dan a Chinese dollar.”<sup>48</sup>

“Chief, I aint any lower dan de royal trashury. We is plumb broke,” Brandt responded, in the dialect written out in the script.

In the skit, the secretary of the treasury informs the king about the Truman Doctrine, prompting all the cannibals to sing about it to the tune of “The Riff Song,” from the operetta *The Desert Song*. This number included lyrics about the cannibals getting “paid just to keep the Reds away/Soak Uncle Sam for a billion bucks or so,” as well as a call to “Massa Truman, save us please from Old Red Joe.”

The Gridironer playing Soviet premier Joseph Stalin then entered to sing about the glories of the Soviet Union, until the Gridironer playing Secretary Marshall arrived for a duet with Stalin to the tune of “Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better” from the popular Broadway musical, *Annie Get Your Gun*. Here is Marshall, halfway through the song:

I can drop a rocket into your hip-pocket.  
I can bounce uranium right on Russia’s cranium.  
Stalin: I can use a Trojan horse.  
Marshall: You mean THAT GUY HANK?

<sup>46</sup>“American Debunker: A Close-Up of the Gridiron Club by Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg,” *Liberty*, Apr. 12, 1941, clipped in box 33, RCP.

<sup>47</sup>Rhae Lynn Barnes, “Darkology: The Hidden History of Amateur Blackface Minstrelsy and the Making of Modern America, 1860–1970” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2016) [and book in progress].

<sup>48</sup>“Foreign Affairs Skit,” May 10, 1947, folder “Dinner Programs - May 1947,” box 70, Gridiron Club Records (MSS60228), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Stalin (spoken): Da!  
 Marshall: We think he's rank.<sup>49</sup>

"Hank" referred to Henry Wallace, part of the late Franklin Roosevelt's Brains Trust and now persona non grata in Washington. Wallace was seen as someone reciting the Soviet propaganda line that U.S. economic aid was politically menacing—supporting "British imperialist policy," as he called it in a widely reported speech.<sup>50</sup> The realities of imperialism were not meant to be spoken out loud, as Wallace was doing, but only in off-the-record luncheons and songs. A Wallace character soon entered the scene dressed as a Boy Scout to sing "You Can't Win the Peace with a Gun," to the tune of "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun," also from *Annie Get Your Gun*. Wallace was supposed to be seen as a ridiculous, naïve dupe, since the common agreement by now in Washington was that guns—or missiles—were necessary to winning the peace. Peace was waged, as war was, with uranium, on Russia's cranium, so to speak.

The skit ended with the arrival of a Gridironer playing the State Department advisor John Foster Dulles, who was still six years away from becoming Secretary of State, but who at that time was being mentioned for that job in the hypothetical Republican administration that polls favored to win in 1948.<sup>51</sup> The syndicated columnist Marquis (Mark) Childs, playing Dulles, sang that the United States was coming after the British Empire to the tune of "California Here I Come":

The Turks and Greeks said, Don't be late,  
 Save us from an awful fate.  
 Leave your dollars at the gate.  
 British Empire here we come.<sup>52</sup>

Empire, in particular, was a common point of contention in discussion of America's proper role in the post-World War II international order. In February 1947, Marshall had spoken off-the-record to diplomatic reporters at a session at the same hotel about one of the main hypocrisies that the United States was facing in its postwar task: imperial power. Wallace Deuel summarized Marshall's assessment in his notes: "Long critical of the British Empire, the U.S. must now accept responsibilities for doing at least some of the things the British have done in the past." Deuel then quoted Marshall directly as having said, "It causes quite a wrench in your thinking."<sup>53</sup> Throughout the period of U.S. wartime and postwar expansion, there was acceptance of how problematic imperialism was, as the United States publicly declared that it believed in self-determination for free peoples but also supported its Allies, the colonizing French and British. Empire was inescapable, no matter how much a wrench it threw into one's thinking. British Empire, here we come.

In a front-page *Christian Science Monitor* article in late April 1947, Joseph Harsch characterized the Truman Doctrine as an "uneconomic and ideological struggle with Russia," which, fortunately, he believed, was already being abandoned in favor of an economic and non-ideological one. He wrote about the "major shift" from a weak and costly plan to one that

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Wallace delivered the speech at a Madison Square Garden rally on Sept. 12, 1946, and repeated much of it in a radio address on all four networks on Sept. 20, 1946, the full text of which went out over the Associated Press wire and was published in full in many newspapers the following day. "Wallace Warns on 'Tough' Policy toward Russia," *New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1946, 1; "Wallace Explains," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1946, 1.

<sup>51</sup>Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (New York, 2013), 91.

<sup>52</sup>"Foreign Affairs Skit."

<sup>53</sup>Notes, Feb. 27, 1947, chron. files, box 9, WRD.

focused on “the heart of western civilization, which is western Europe.”<sup>54</sup> A reader—a World War II veteran living in Princeton—wrote to Harsch that Americans were not being told the real story of *why* the country was opposing Soviet expansion in Western Europe. He doubted that what the U.S. had in mind really was improving the conditions of Europeans but instead its own interests, which could lead to backing “regimes which will first protect their and our interests,” rather than improving political and economic conditions. The United States had done this in the past, he noted. “If we do it in the future, our hypocrisy will one day become evident, and I fear for our nation in the storm which will break.”<sup>55</sup>

Harsch did not address all of the reader’s concerns in his response, but he replied with a frank discussion of the difference between what leaders said publicly and privately. He wrote:

May I say that so far as I have been able as a reporter to determine the real reason in the minds of Washington’s top diplomatic planners for our resistance to communist expansion it is the conflict of economic and political interests. The ideological argument is used for the purpose of obtaining Congressional action and popular approval, but in talking privately to the men who make policy I find this issue usually played way down and frequently ignored all together.<sup>56</sup>

Harsch went so far as to say that the U.S. would be having similar concerns about stabilizing Russia’s borders if it were ruled by Peter the Great instead of Stalin. Harsch’s response—that “the anti-communist crusade is a device” and that even if Truman was not clear on that point, Secretary of State Marshall was—was likely of little comfort to the reader, who may have hoped for a similar frankness on the front page of his chosen newspaper.<sup>57</sup>

Daily newspapers covered the many variables that went into foreign policy, and insiders discussed hypocrisy among themselves, but only outsiders, like the most famous iconoclastic reporter of this period, I. F. Stone, stated the hypocrisy outright.<sup>58</sup> “Only naivete and ignorance can accept Mr. Truman’s pharisaical self-portrait of American policy,” Stone wrote in 1949. “A government which constantly bypasses the UN, curries favor with Peron, does business with any number of military dictators in Latin America, deals under the table with Franco, interferes in Italian elections, and supports reactionaries in Greece has too many moles in its own eye to preach a dubious freedom in Eastern Europe and China.”<sup>59</sup>

One month after the Gridiron dinner, Marshall announced the second major foreign policy initiative of the Truman administration—the increase in economic aid to Europe that Harsch had reported on in April—in a June 1947 commencement speech at Harvard. The Marshall Plan, as it became known, required a major public relations effort to get passage through Congress.<sup>60</sup> The historian Thomas Borstelmann in *The Cold War and the Color Line* has demonstrated that the Cold War consensus was based in a white supremacy that valued Western

<sup>54</sup>Joseph C. Harsch, “U.S. Due to Build New Frontier In Western Europe,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Apr. 27, 1947, 1.

<sup>55</sup>John Campbell Ausland to Joseph Harsch, Apr. 29, 1947, folder “Correspondence 1941-1948,” box 3, JCH.

<sup>56</sup>Joseph Harsch to John Campbell Ausland, May 14, 1947, folder “Correspondence 1941-1948,” box 3, JCH.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>On Stone, see Robert C. Cottrell, *Izzy: A Biography of I.F. Stone* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1992); Myra MacPherson, “All Governments Lie!”: *The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I. F. Stone* (New York, 2008); D. D. Guttenplan, *American Radical: The Life and Times of I. F. Stone* (New York, 2009); and Lucas Graves, “Blogging Back Then: Annotative Journalism in *I.F. Stone’s Weekly* and Talking Points Memo,” *Journalism* 16, no. 1 (2015): 99–118.

<sup>59</sup>I. F. Stone, “With Malice Towards None—Except Half Mankind,” Jan. 21, 1949, in I. F. Stone, *The Truman Era* (London, 1953), 58–60, here 59.

<sup>60</sup>See Michael Wala, “Selling the Marshall Plan at Home: The Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery,” *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 3 (July 1986): 247–65; and Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe* (New York, 1987).

Europeans over colonial peoples.<sup>61</sup> This was, indeed, the consensus actively built in the Statler Hotel. The affinity that reporters and foreign policy elites felt for Western Europe and the importance placed on maintaining strong ties with Atlantic allies had roots in a worldview that privileged whiteness—that condoned blackface.

In selling the ERP to white reporters, the Under Secretary of State, Robert Lovett, emphasized, according to Deuel's notes from a background session: "The Europeans are 'first class people.' 'The fundamentals of life are still there.' The land is there, technology is advanced, etc. 'Damn it all,' he can't see why it can't be saved. It was 'one of the nicest places in the world.'"<sup>62</sup> The Marshall Plan was envisioned as aid only for these "first class" people. Lovett framed ERP as a way for the United States to export surplus capital, a distinctly revisionist understanding. He explicitly put the British Empire analogy into the context of a search for markets, the heart of what William A. Williams would call the tragedy of American diplomacy. Deuel wrote detailed, confidential notes of the meeting, noting that Lovett had said, "America's position now is analogous [*sic*] to that of Britain after the Napoleonic wars. Capital is accumulating in the U.S. at a terrific rate. The British exported capital then, we can do it now. But fiscal stability is required in the places to which capital could be exported."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, private conversations in this period shared more similarity with the Cold War revisionist discourse of economic determinism than with the traditionalist narrative they ostensibly reflected.<sup>64</sup> That is, reporters helped maintain the fiction that the United States was *not* building an empire, or searching for markets, or promoting colonialism as a way to maintain access to raw materials in colonies, even when they discussed those motives among themselves. The administration was not propagandizing them into patriotic anticommunist submission. Indeed, in this early phase of the Cold War, the government's propaganda efforts were barely developed, and the institutions designed to support Cold War foreign policy were still nascent.<sup>65</sup>

Despite what the administration said publicly about its priorities, and regardless of the deeply ingrained anticommunist attitudes of much of the country, the threat of communism was secondary in Washington. Within Washington, the narrative was about having rubber, tin, sugar, and manganese from European colonial holdings, factors sometimes acknowledged in print but that appeared more often and more bluntly in private notes. It was about saving a first-class people, since it would be ridiculous to prioritize those uncivilized peoples who barely had "Sekataries of de Trashury." Underdeveloped areas, as they were called, did receive aid from a separate allocation of money in 1949 with the Point Four Program, which assisted nations where the technology and institutions were not advanced enough, the reasoning went, for the economic aid then being given to civilized nations. From the beginning, though, the Point Four program was intertwined with the U.S. project to procure minerals, even as the government recognized the need to distance itself—rhetorically, certainly—from racialized exploitation.<sup>66</sup> Seventy years later, we remember the Marshall Plan and have all but forgotten Point Four assistance, which reflects the amount of money and press coverage each received.<sup>67</sup> The legacy of the Marshall Plan was one of European recovery, while the legacy of the Point Four program ended up being a less savory narrative of access to raw materials

<sup>61</sup>Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 69–72. Diplomatic historians have long recognized the centrality of a white "civilization" discourse to U.S. foreign policy. For a recent synthesis, see Michael Kimmage, *The Abandonment of the West: The History of an Idea in American Foreign Policy* (New York, 2020).

<sup>62</sup>Notes, Oct. 25, 1947, folder "Journal – October 1947," box 9, WRD.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>On traditionalism versus revisionism, see Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy*, 9–61.

<sup>65</sup>On building out of the propaganda apparatus, see Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 32–45.

<sup>66</sup>Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 124–32.

<sup>67</sup>See Thomas G. Paterson, "Foreign Aid Under Wraps: The Point Four Program," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 56, no. 2 (Winter 1972–1973): 119–26.

and developing industry for the West, with little of the promised uplift or poverty relief for the recipient nations.<sup>68</sup>

### Outside the Sphere

The discourse that was private among the white, male journalists whom the diplomatic press corps comprised, and kept out of white newspapers, was clearly visible in the Black press, whose reporters had no invitations to lose and few social functions with State Department dignitaries. A front-page headline from September 1946 in the *Atlanta Daily World*, “Africans Stay Poor While Europeans Rob Rich Mines,” ran above a story from the Associated Negro Press, a wire service for Black newspapers that meant the story had wide distribution. The article began with the explanation that, “Poverty stricken Ashanti people must remain poor while their wealthy mineral mines are robbed by the British.”<sup>69</sup> The exploitation by European colonial power, which publicly was only part of the discourse of the Black press, was privately under discussion and de-emphasized by the white press. No white newspaper could have run a similar story and had its reporter ever again invited to an off-the-record or background session. The white writers for socialist newspapers, like Stone, who did make those critiques, had long been purged from insider gatherings.<sup>70</sup> The Black press publicly characterized anticommunism from the beginning as a project of U.S.–British imperialism. One columnist in the influential *Chicago Defender* wrote in May 1946 about the quest for oil in the Middle East:

The truth is that behind the curtain of Kremlin-baiting lurked a couple of unsavory characters who were engaged in a little drama of their own. They could be named Wall Street and London City, respectively identified as U.S. and British imperialism. Their joint aim is to plunder as much of the wealth and resources of the Near East as they can.<sup>71</sup>

These articles were written before the passage of ERP, legislation that most high-profile Black organizations, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), ultimately endorsed, though not without registering disapproval of its inherent racial bias. W. O. Walker of the *Cleveland Call and Post*, in a column that was then also excerpted in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, wrote:

[T]he Marshall plan is nothing short of being the biggest appeasement effort ever put forward by the American government to save England and several other European countries in which American banks and investment houses have large financial holdings. ... As I see it, the Marshall Plan simply is trying to provide a breathing spell for these European nations until they can better organize themselves to take more wealth out of the hides and lands of their exploited people.<sup>72</sup>

Walker was a fairly radical columnist, but even influential Black activists in the mainstream who supported the Marshall Plan spoke of its discrimination, which was overlooked in the

<sup>68</sup>Stephen Macekura argues that historians, including Paterson, cited above, have unfairly “disparaged the program as exploitative, or dismissed it as insignificant.” Stephen Macekura, “The Point Four Program and U.S. International Development Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 127–60, here 130.

<sup>69</sup>Associated Negro Press, “Africans Stay Poor While Europeans Rob Rich Mines,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Sept. 5, 1946, 1.

<sup>70</sup>Stone resigned from the National Press Club in 1941, after the club would not permit him to bring a Black guest to dine there. When he reapplied for admission after the club integrated in 1955, he was blackballed.

<sup>71</sup>John Robert Badger, “World View: Looting the Levantine,” *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1946, 15.

<sup>72</sup>W. O. Walker, “Down the Big Road,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, Oct. 18, 1947, 4B; “Columnists Say,” *Afro Magazine*, Nov. 1, 1947, M8.

white press. During initial congressional hearings on the funding of the ERP in February 1948, Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that while he supported the Marshall Plan, he thought it should be applied more broadly to non-European countries also affected by the war. The page-one headline in the *Atlanta Daily World* proclaimed about that testimony: “Aid Others Beside Europeans—White.”<sup>73</sup> “Let Marshall Plan Help All, Senate Told,” was the *Baltimore Afro-American*’s more subdued version.<sup>74</sup> Some version of the story seems to have appeared in every major Black newspaper over the next ten days.

White’s testimony seems not to have been mentioned in the mainstream white press at all, except at the end of a story by Alfred Friendly in the *Washington Post* summarizing the testimony of several Marshall Plan supporters and noting only that White had “urged the Marshall Plan as a step in ‘human kindness.’”<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the *New York Times*, the publisher of which was friends with the financier Bernard Baruch, printed Baruch’s testimony in favor of the Marshall Plan in full around the same time. Baruch’s statement is one of the only times “colonies” appears in the same story as the Marshall Plan in a major white newspaper during the congressional hearings, and the context was not one of racial critique.<sup>76</sup> Instead, Baruch said that the United States should take measures that would indicate to the world: “We stand ready to assure a market for the productive labor of all peoples for the next five years. Bring out the resources that lie in the ground. Go out into your colonies and the far reaches of the world and tap their riches. Produce! You will be able to sell it all.”<sup>77</sup> The *Times* seems otherwise to have been silent on the colonial issue, the critique of the Black press not penetrating the sphere of consensus built in white Washington around support for the Marshall Plan.

In March 1948, the *Chicago Defender* decided to take the same line as the NAACP: to endorse passage of the Marshall Plan, with the caveat that “some effort must be made by our government to extend this foreign aid to the non-white nations who have suffered as much from the ravages of war. ... The Negro republics and the colonial peoples should be counted in the budget for world peace.”<sup>78</sup> The caveat was not one the white press embraced or seems even to have covered, apart from noting the necessity for Western Europe to increase production from its colonies to be able to take full advantage of American plans. The diplomatic reporter Ferdinand Kuhn had a front-page story in the *Washington Post*, based on a report by the President’s Committee on Foreign Aid (the Harriman Committee), which ended with a list of nine necessary natural resources in alphabetical order, from bauxite to tungsten, and where specifically those resources could be obtained. The headline read: “U.S. to Seek Rare Minerals from Europe,” but the article specified in its first paragraph that the materials were from “Europe and its colonies” (emphasis added), the most important of which was Belgian Congo. Of the list of nine specific materials that came from the Harriman report, only one actually came from Europe—tungsten, from Portugal, the cost of which was deemed too high to make it attractive to the United States anyway.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Louis Lautier, *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 1, 1948, 1.

<sup>74</sup>“Let Marshall Plan Help All, Senate Told,” *Afro-American*, Feb. 7, 1948, 13.

<sup>75</sup>Alfred Friendly, “Billion Slash in Initial Aid Hinted by GOP,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 28, 1948, 1. Based on results in eleven white newspapers in Proquest Historical Newspapers: walter AND white AND (“national association” or naacp or n.a.a.c.p.) AND (“marshall plan” or “European recovery”) in 1948. White was simultaneously trying to get an anti-lynching bill through Congress, so his name does appear in the white press in relation to that bill, including as the author of columns in the *New York Herald Tribune* in this period, but not in relation to the critique of the Marshall Plan or foreign policy.

<sup>76</sup>Based on results in eleven white newspapers in Proquest Historical Newspapers; searches included: 1. (colonies or colonial or colony) and (“marshall plan” or “European recovery program”); 2. (non-white or colored or Africa) and (“marshall plan” or “European recovery program”).

<sup>77</sup>“Excerpts from Baruch Statement on Marshall Plan,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1948, 13.

<sup>78</sup>“The Marshall Plan,” *Chicago Defender*, Mar. 13, 1948, 14.

<sup>79</sup>Ferdinand Kuhn, Jr., “U.S. to Seek Rare Minerals from Europe,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 14, 1947, 1.



The Marshall Plan was controversial in Congress, which is why there was such a huge promotional effort, with critics on the floor of the Senate most often making arguments based on domestic labor being disadvantaged, domestic consumers being disadvantaged, or an isolationist foreign policy. Less well remembered are the critics who echoed those of the Black press. For instance, when the isolationist Senator William Langer of North Dakota gave a speech saying that Great Britain was using American dollars to “exploit further colonial Africa,” the content of the speech was covered only by the white press in the *Chicago Tribune*, at least among large-circulation regional newspapers, and in several Black newspapers.<sup>80</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* was often voted the least reliable newspaper by Washington correspondents—meaning the white correspondents who were polled—and at one point State Department officials discussed whether they could just leave out the *Tribune* man from a luncheon they were organizing to discuss the Marshall Plan’s administration. (They decided that they could not, since he wrote for a major white daily: “I don’t see how we can gracefully leave him out.”<sup>81</sup>)

The historian Penny Von Eschen has demonstrated that the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan curbed the ability of Black leaders and the Black press to speak out against U.S. policy abroad.<sup>82</sup> Compared to the white press, though, the Black press was publicly willing to step outside the spheres of consensus and legitimate controversy.<sup>83</sup> Even as Black editorials grew more muted later in the 1940s, as Von Eschen argues, Black public intellectuals such as W. E. B. DuBois continued their criticism and were covered by the Black press. Their critique, therefore, was still part of the mainstream public conversation among African American newspaper readers. DuBois also had a regular column in the *Chicago Defender*, which he used in November 1947 to discuss the Marshall Plan:

The report of the European conference on the Marshall Plan brings forward again the role of colonies. If we are not careful we will fail to realize how the value of the raw material in colonies in this new era of capitalism, may easily stop the broad plan for colonial emancipation laid down by the charter of the United Nations at San Francisco.<sup>84</sup>

The sphere of legitimate controversy was wider in the Black press than in the white press, although each group recognized the same facts in private conversation: that raw materials in colonies were valuable, not to the colonized but the colonizers. Why did it matter if Indonesia went communist? Not because communism was godless and evil, but because, as a State Department source told Wallace Deuel in November 1949 on “BACKGROUND,” which the reporter wrote for himself in capital letters in his notes: “Indonesia is vitally important because of its strategic position, its production of vital raw materials—which are especially important for the success of ERP—including foodstuffs [and] rubber and tin and sugar.”<sup>85</sup> The Marshall Plan could only work if the structures of colonialism remained intact, in contradiction to the public U.S. commitment to self-determination for all peoples.

Even those Black journalists who distanced themselves from radicals like DuBois and his alleged communist affiliations, as many did, agreed with his main points and were not, in

<sup>80</sup>“Senate Warned of Peril in Aid to Imperialism,” *Chicago Tribune*, Apr. 20, 1948, 10; “Langer Assails U.S. Support of Colonial Rule in Africa,” *Atlanta World*, Apr. 23, 1948, 6; “Charges British Use Our Money to Exploit Africa,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Apr. 24, 1948, 1; “U.S. \$\$ Enslaving Africa?” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Apr. 24, 1948, 4.

<sup>81</sup>Joe (Newman) to Bob (Mullen), Oct. 1950, folder “Memoranda: Foster, William C.,” box 13, Subject Files, 1949-53, RG 469, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

<sup>82</sup>Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 107–14.

<sup>83</sup>Hallin’s categories outside the sphere of consensus include the sphere of legitimate controversy and the sphere of deviance (*The “Uncensored War,”* 116–7).

<sup>84</sup>W. E. B. DuBois, “The Winds of Time: Marshall Plan,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 8, 1947, 15.

<sup>85</sup>Notes, Nov. 4, 1949, chron. files, box 10, WRD.

fact, afraid to say so in print. DuBois gave a speech in April 1949 in which he said if the U.S. government's lies about Soviets were "similar to the lies which Americans have been taught to believe during the past three hundred years about the Negro, God help America!"<sup>86</sup> Arthur Fauset, in a column in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, commented, "One need not be a Communist to agree with Dr. DuBois. And no man should be accused of being disloyal to our country for pointing out such a telling fact. It is time for us Americans to be willing to face the truth and to do something about it other than point the finger of blame in the other man's face."<sup>87</sup> Again, that idea of American hypocrisy commonplace in the Black press and the Black experience occurred only in private for the white press. In private, the acknowledgment of U.S. hypocrisy is often breathtaking. One of the most striking examples is a 1942 letter that Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the *New York Times* publisher and a pro-British internationalist, wrote—but did not send—to *Life* magazine. *Life* had been critical of Britain trying to maintain her Empire, arguing that it was preventing the Allies from opening a second front in the war. Sulzberger wrote in this never-mailed letter, "If the British were to use the same method we employed in solving our own Indian question it would produce photographs for *Life* even more circulation-building than slaughtered Chinese or Nazi executioners at work. But that isn't quite fair; times have changed since we cheated and tricked and finally mowed down the men, women and children that we called Indians..."<sup>88</sup>

The mainstream liberal internationalist reporters of the 1940s and the 1950s can only be regarded as somehow less jaded or more patriotically naïve about the United States and its history and motives if the opinions they chose to keep behind closed doors or in the unsent files of their archives are ignored. Further, white reporters did not acknowledge unsavory facts, not for fear of being accused of disloyalty to their government, but of disloyalty to each other and to the Western Civilization they cherished, not to mention the readers on whom their livelihood depended. They needed to remain within the framework of American self-righteousness to keep their audience and their jobs, not because of blind patriotism or misplaced fealty to objectivity. As the *Christian Science Monitor* reporter Joseph Harsch wrote in 1953 to a Columbia University history professor who inquired about an article: "The events as I, and I think most of my colleagues see them, sometimes run counter to the current of American folklore. Were I to write the story of Washington today exactly as I see it I would soon alienate much of my audience and in the process, deprive myself entirely of an audience."<sup>89</sup> The folklore dominated that "story of Washington" that Harsch and his colleagues told.

Foreign policy strategies shifted during the early years of the Cold War, as cabinet members and a president came and went. But with each new policy came a similar conversation—one that appeared different in public and in private. For instance, in January 1951, when Dwight Eisenhower was Supreme Allied Commander of the newly established North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the *New York Times's* Washington bureau chief, Arthur Krock, wrote a summary of a "very small confidential meeting today at luncheon" with the general at the Statler Hotel. He sent it to the *Times's* managing editor in New York "for the Publisher's private eyes and yours."<sup>90</sup> In that memo, Krock wrote of the necessity of building up fifty or fifty-five NATO divisions in Europe: "That is because only Western Europe and its colonies, possessions and related allies in the Eastern Hemisphere can furnish the things we need, and Western Europe is the cradle of our civilization. If it goes India will follow soon, for example, and

<sup>86</sup>Quoted in Arthur Fauset, "I Write as I See: America's Double Talk," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Apr. 2, 1949, 4.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Arthur Hays Sulzberger to *Life* (not sent), Oct. 1942, folder 8, box 274, Arthur Hays Sulzberger Papers (MssCol 17782), New York Times Company Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.

<sup>89</sup>Joseph Harsch to Henry Steele Commager, Nov. 1953, folder "Correspondence 1942-1953," box 38, JCH.

<sup>90</sup>Arthur Krock to E.L. James, Jan. 5, 1951, book II, box 1, AKP.

where will we get our manganese?”<sup>91</sup> In the 1960s, these material reasons behind military buildup became part of the Marxian critique of U.S. foreign policy, which later made it seem as if mainstream liberal intellectuals and journalists had not realized the economic imperatives behind postwar foreign policy earlier, or had been duped. Reporters were not duped. The seemingly radical idea of economic determinism was accepted in the mainstream within Washington. But it was usually kept there, off-the-record, without filtering into the common understanding of the period.

The private conversation among white, male diplomatic reporters in Washington was not so radical that it would have perfectly tracked onto the arguments of Black newspapers, Soviets, or revisionists—that U.S. foreign policy was primarily driven by corporate greed. Behind closed doors, diplomatic reporters were not critiquing capitalism, which at the time they would have still equated with democracy. But they *were* acknowledging the economic interest that the United States had in other territories, and that expansionist, pro-colonial interests trumped any ideological concerns about anticommunism. After all, in hindsight, when the Cold War ended and global communism no longer seemed like a threat, the United States did not suddenly pull back from its overseas commitments, instead redoubling efforts to gain footholds in resource-rich countries.

Historians have the opportunity to challenge more deeply and contextualize the newspaper articles we rely on so heavily in our work. Published articles are artifacts, created under circumstances that need to be understood and interrogated before we make assumptions about the perspectives of either the writers or the news outlets behind them. *Washington Post* diplomatic reporter Chalmers Roberts, in a 1966 oral history interview, gives us a chilling warning: “They take too much of the official record to be the fact of the thing. But, God knows, that’s the problem of all history.”<sup>92</sup>

**Kathryn J. McGarr** is an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, US. She is the author of *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics* (Public Affairs, 2011) and is currently working on a history of foreign policy reporters in mid-twentieth-century Washington.

---

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Roberts interview.